

# MPs' EXPENSES

## A consultation

This response sets out the views of Christine Hemming who is the wife of the MP John Hemming and who has been employed at no remuneration to do the expenses for her husband over the last 5 years.

*Q1: Do you agree that the CSPL's principles, supplemented as proposed, should form the basis of the new expenses system?*

Agree with the principle.

*Q2: Do you agree with our proposal to concentrate on expenses rather than allowances wherever possible?*

I agree with the principle in paragraph 4.4 which sets out that expenses should be payable for expenses actually and reasonably incurred provided the cost of administration is not disproportionate to the benefits for the house or the member.

*Q3: Do you agree that there should be annual limits to the amount that can be spent from public funds on each of the main elements of our expenses scheme, except for travel and subsistence?*

I disagree with setting artificial caps on expenditure. I support the provision of rules which set out principles. In the context that all claims will be published caps should not be necessary. Members should be encouraged to demonstrate leadership and integrity to restore the standing of MPs in the eyes of the electorate. It may be that engagement with the scrutiny of expenses is the precursor to engagement with other issues of governance and democracy.

*Q4: Do you agree with our approach to the submission of claims?*

Yes I agree with the process. However, as I am not remunerated for my work I am excluded from receiving training by the house under the Capita rules. Provision should be extended to volunteers who do this work.

*Q5: Are you content with our proposed approach to the publication of claims?*

Yes

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The running costs for maintaining accommodation should mirror all the HMRC rules applicable to rented fully furnished accommodation which are claimable by landlords for periods when the accommodation is unlet. I understand this to include service costs, gas and electric and security but also emergency repairs, and a percentage of capital costs incurred in reoccupying the property on a depreciation basis, ensuring environmental sustainability in insulation, checks and repairs of appliances to ensure health and safety and initial cleaning. HMRC should be consulted to ensure full compatibility with HMRC guidelines. If the landlord is responsible for these matters in the contract that should not be an issue, but my experience a significant proportion of landlords even social landlords do not move to quickly repair and replace faulty heating and plumbing and it would be counter productive for MPs to be pursuing their own battles to support a place to live.

It maybe that the IPSA could fund a post to assist MPs in dealing with housing issues arising from the deficiencies of their landlords.

*Q12: Which of the options that we set out do you favour in providing assurance about claims for travel expenses?*

None of the options outlined are effective.

The method which I believe is most efficient and auditable is to install a computer based system which identifies the vehicle the MP uses, records start and end mileage and purpose of the journey. The total mileage claimed can be assessed against a yearly or change of vehicle mileage recorded for the vehicle as part of an MOT or service log. These systems are regularly operated by large companies and would fit within the intention to computerise submissions. There may even be an application for iphones or notebooks which can be completed "on site".

The wording of Para 7.28 implies that when the children leave home I will not be able to claim travel to see my husband. Is that what is intended? If so it doesn't make sense because currently I have often have to delegate my caring responsibilities to help in London, so I fail to see the linkage between caring responsibilities and travel.

*Q13: Do you agree with our approach to travel by public transport, including ordinarily travelling standard class?*

No.

1. MPs do not always start out from home so I consider the best method of calculating transport costs would be actual expenses incurred on a reasonable and justifiable basis.
2. Public transport should be the preferred means of travel. However, as you will be able to see from John Hemming expenses claims he attempts to travel standard restricted or saver class wherever possible. However, this inevitably means that tickets are sometimes useless even if bought for the expected time of travel and

the live in lover would be free under all circumstances to pocket as much money as she/he wishes as an employee. This is hardly promoting family values and setting a good example to the population.

The Welsh Assembly definition is more workable.

*Q15: We propose that IPSA should prohibit MPs from renting from, or purchasing goods or services from, members of their families. Do you agree with this approach?*

No

They should be able to follow accepted good business practise and demonstrate through quotations for services that the lowest tender according to specification has been obtained for each service. For example if the grandfather runs a central heating business in the area why should he be excluded from repairing the office heating if he provides best value and local employment.

All tenders and quotations should be published.

*Q16: Do you agree with our proposed approach to communications expenditure?*

yes

*Q17: Do you believe there should be any form of payment in the event of an MP leaving Parliament, either voluntarily or otherwise?*

There should be a job search support provided and funded by parliament to help MPs resettle in new employment or unemployment if needed and paid assistance with removal and out of pocket expenses in connection with parliament actually incurred for a defined period.

There should be redundancy provisions that reflect those applicable to the rest of the population, for example as provided for staff of the house and civil servants at the same level.

*Q18: What impact do you believe our proposals might have on the diversity of representation in the House of Commons?*

The current proposals are de-motivating to me as a woman with caring responsibilities a family life and from an ethnic minority group. However, in my view the job of MP is likely to be attractive only to those who have independent means, a dedication to political power, or an income below £30,000. It will not be a lifestyle sought by individuals who are in secure employment with a 40 hour working week and earning over £30,000. On the latter basis the numbers of ethnic minority representatives are more likely to increase as they are mainly represented in the lower paid groups.